



Factsheet: Hurricanes

The Facts

A hurricane is a tropical storm with winds that have reached a constant speed of 74 miles per hour or more. Hurricane winds blow in a large spiral around a relative calm center known as the "eye." The "eye" is generally 20 to 30 miles wide, and the storm may extend outward 400 miles. As a hurricane approaches, the skies will begin to darken and winds will grow in strength. As a hurricane nears land, it can bring torrential rains, high winds, and storm surges. A single hurricane can last for more than 2 weeks over open waters and can run a path across the entire length of the eastern seaboard. August and September are peak months during the hurricane season that lasts from June 1 through November 30. Hurricanes can be dangerous killers. Learning the hurricane warning messages and planning ahead can reduce the chances of injury or major property damage.



BEFORE

Have disaster supplies on hand.

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water supply
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines and prescriptions
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Make shelter arrangements for pets.

Pets may not be allowed into emergency shelters for health and space reasons. Contact the DC Animal Shelter (24 hours) (202) 576-6664 or the Government of the District Columbia Citywide Call Center (202) 727-1000 for information on local animal shelters.

Protect your windows.

Permanent shutters are the best protection. A lower-cost approach is to put up plywood panels. Use 1/2-inch plywood--marine plywood is best--cut to fit each window. Remember to mark which board fits which window. Pre-drill holes every 18 inches for screws. **Complete this action well before arrival of the storm.**

Protect your property.

Trim dead or weak or weak branches from trees. Remove or secure lawn furnishings, trashcans and other items, which could become airborne causing damage or personal injury.

Get adequate insurance coverage.

Be certain you have adequate home insurance coverage. Your standard home policy does not cover damage from the flooding that accompanies a hurricane. Contact the **D.C. Floodplain Coordinator, 202-535-2248**, to learn more about FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program. Normally, there is a 30-day waiting period before a new policy becomes effective.

Develop an emergency communication plan.

In case family members are separated from one another during a disaster (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

Hurricane Watches and Warnings

A hurricane watch is issued when there is a threat of hurricane conditions within 24-36 hours. A hurricane warning is issued when hurricane conditions (winds of 74 miles per hour or greater, or dangerously high water and rough seas) are expected in 24 hours or less.

DURING A HURRICANE WATCH

- Listen to a battery-operated radio or television for hurricane progress reports.
- Check emergency supplies.
- Fuel car.
- Bring in outdoor objects such as lawn furniture, toys, and garden tools and anchor objects that cannot be brought inside.
- Secure buildings by closing and boarding up windows. Remove outside antennas.
- Turn refrigerator and freezer to coldest settings. Open only when absolutely necessary and close quickly.
- Store drinking water in clean bathtubs, jugs, bottles, and cooking utensils.
- Review evacuation plan.
- Moor boat securely or move it to a designated safe place. Use rope or chain to secure boat to trailer. Use "tie-downs" to anchor trailer to the ground or house.

DURING A HURRICANE WARNING

- Listen constantly to a battery-operated radio or television for official instructions.
- If in a mobile home, check "tie-downs" and evacuate immediately.
- Store valuables and personal papers in a waterproof container on the highest level of your home.
- Avoid elevators.

If at home:

- Stay inside, away from windows, skylights, and glass doors.
- Keep a supply of flashlights and extra batteries handy. Avoid open flames, such as candles and kerosene lamps, as a source of light.
- If power is lost, turn off major appliances to reduce power "surge" when electricity is restored.

If officials indicate evacuation is necessary:

- Leave as soon as possible. Avoid flooded roads and watch for washed-out bridges.
- Secure your home by unplugging appliances and turning off electricity and the main water valve.
- Tell someone outside of the storm area where you are going.
- If time permits, and you live in an identified surge zone, elevate furniture to protect it from flooding or better yet, move it to a higher floor.
- Bring pre-assembled emergency supplies and warm protective clothing.
- Take blankets and sleeping bags to shelter.
- Lock up home and leave.

AFTER

Stay tuned to local radio for information.

Help injured or trapped persons.

- Give first aid where appropriate.
- Do not move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. Call for help.
- Drive only if absolutely necessary and avoid flooded roads and washed-out bridges.
- Use telephone only for emergency calls.

Return home only after authorities advise that it is safe.

- Avoid loose or dangling power lines and report them immediately to the power company, police, or fire department.
- Enter your home with caution.
- Beware of snakes, insects, and animals driven to higher ground by flood water.
- Open windows and doors to ventilate and dry your home.
- Check refrigerated foods for spoilage.
- Take pictures of the damage, both to the house and its contents and for insurance claims.

INSPECTING UTILITIES IN A DAMAGED HOME

Check for gas leaks--If you smell gas or hear blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.

Look for electrical system damage--If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice.

Check for sewage and water lines damage--If you suspect sewage lines are damaged avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid the water from the tap. You can obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.

MITIGATION

Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventive mitigation steps now such as strengthening unreinforced masonry to withstand wind and flooding and installing shutters on every window will help reduce the impact of hurricanes in the future.

Contact the District of Columbia Emergency Management Agency, Hazard Mitigation Officer on (202) 673-2101 ext. 1163 for additional information regarding personal preparedness and protection measures.